

## Message Text

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ACTION NEA-07

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S E C R E T BEIRUT 2166

E.O. 11652: GDS  
TAGS: PINT LE  
SUBJ: CRISIS IN LEBANON: DISCUSSION WITH SAEB SALAM

1. SUMMARY. SAEB SALAM FEELS CHRISTIAN PRESSURES ON SUNNIS ARE UNPRODUCTIVE. DOUBTS THAT OPEN DISCUSSION OF PALESTINIAN PRESENCE IS GOING TO HELP AND THINKS SOLUTION MUST COME THROUGH QUIET DIPLOMACY. CONFIRMS STATEMENTS OF WALID JUMBLATT THAT MUSLIMS CONSIDER NEW LEBANESE ARMY TO BE PRO-MARONITE AND ANTI-MUSLIM. SAYS FRANGIEH DIFFERING WITH OTHER CHRISTIAN FRONT LEADERSHIP OVER AIN AR-RUMMANEH INCIDENT AND SUPPORTING SYRIANS. HE DOES NOT SEEM PARTICULARLY CHEERFUL ABOUT THE FUTURE. END SUMMARY.

2. CALLED ON FORMER PRIME MINISTER SAEB SALAM, LEADING SUNNI POLITICIAN, APRIL 17 TO DISCUSS SITUATION. SALAM SAID THAT CHRISTIAN ATTITUDES HAD HARDENED PERCEPTIBLY IN PAST MONTH, EITHER BECAUSE OF AIN AR-RUMMANEH INCIDENTS OR BECAUSE OF CYNICAL MANIPULATION BY CHAMOUN. CONSTANT HAMMERING BY CHRISTIAN RIGHT, FIRST ON PARTITION AND NOW ON OPENING THE PALESTINIAN FILE, WAS DRIVING SUNNIS INTO A CORNER.

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3. HE HAD NOT YET DECIDED WHAT HIS POSITION WAS GOING TO BE ON THE PROPOSAL TO HAVE PARLIAMENT DEBATE THE PALESTINIAN PROBLEM ON THURSDAY, THE 20TH. AS BETWEEN BOYCOTTING THE SESSION AND HAVING ONE WHICH ENGAGED IN A STERILE AND POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS DISCUSSION, HE DID NOT FAVOR BOYCOTTING. HE WOULD PREFER, HOWEVER, THAT THE SECOND ALTERNATIVE ALSO BE AVOIDED AND THAT PEOPLE LOOK AT QUESTION CALMLY

AND LOGICALLY.

4. SALAM SAID THAT IF CHRISTIANS WERE ABLE TO TAKE ON THE PALESTINIANS AND PUSH THEM INTO THE SEA OR IF PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE WOULD SOMEHOW LEAD TO REDUCTION OF PALESTINIAN ARMED PRESENCE THERE WOULD BE SOME LOGIC IN UNDERTAKING SUCH AN EXERCISE. PROBLEM WAS THAT CHRISTIANS DID NOT HAVE SUCH A CAPABILITY AND THAT PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE WAS NOT GOING TO CHANGE SITUATION. ONLY WAY PROBLEM COULD BE DEALT WITH EFFECTIVELY WAS POLITICALLY, AND CHRISTIANS WOULD HAVE TO REALIZE THAT SUNNIS WOULD COOPERATE IN THIS RESPECT ONLY ON THE BASIS OF EQUALITY AND AN AGREED PLAN OF ACTION.

5. CHRISTIANS KEPT CALLING FOR THE MUSLIMS TO STAND UP AND BE COUNTED. THE MUSLIM LEFT WAS AT ITS LOWEST EBB AT THE MOMENT AS DEMONSTRATED BY ITS DEFEAT IN THE MAQASSID CHARITABLE ASSOCIATION ELECTION THE DAY BEFORE. THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT HAD BEEN VOTED OUT BY THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE GOOD MUSLIM FAMILIES OF BEIRUT. WERE THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THESE FAMILIES, HOWEVER, TO STAND UP AND START ATTACKING THE PALESTINIANS THE WAY THE CHRISTIANS WANTED THEM TO, IT WOULD VERY QUICKLY STIMULATE THE RADICALS TO REACT, AND THEY WOULD HAVE A POWERFUL CAUSE TO AGITATE. HE DID NOT KNOW THE SOLUTION TO THE PALESTINIAN PROBLEM BUT HE DID KNOW THAT IT WOULD HAVE TO BE REACHED THROUGH QUIET POLITICAL NEGOTIATION, NOT THROUGH PUBLIC DEBATE.

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6. SALAM REITERATED HIS CONVICTION THAT PROGRESS ON THE FUNDAMENTAL PALESTINE PROBLEM WAS ESSENTIAL TO AVOID CATASTROPHE IN THE AREA. ANY ATTEMPT TO DEAL WITH THE PROBLEMS OF THE PALESTINIAN PRESENCE IN LEBANON WAS ONLY A TEMPORARY PALLIATIVE IN THE ABSENCE OF PROGRESS ON THE BASIC PROBLEM. IT WAS ESSENTIAL THAT UNIFIL BE ESTABLISHED IN SOUTH LEBANON AND THAT THE LEBANESE ARMY ALSO ESTABLISH A PRESENCE THERE, BUT AS SOON AS UNIFIL LEFT THE PALESTINIANS WOULD COME BACK UNLESS THERE WAS SOME PROGRESS ON THE FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEM.

7. SALAM SAID HE SUPPOSED THAT INTERNATIONALIZATION OF THE LEBANESE PROBLEM AS A WHOLE WAS IMPOSSIBLE BUT HE FOR ONE WOULD WELCOME IT IF IT COULD BE DONE SOMEHOW. I SAID IT WAS NOT IN THE CARDS.

8. SALAM CONFIRMED WALID JUMBLATT'S OBSERVATIONS OF TWO DAYS EARLIER THAT THERE WAS A GENERAL MUSLIM CONVICTION THAT SARKIS AND KHOURY WERE REBUILDING AN ARMY DOMINATED BY MARONITES. THERE MIGHT BE INTEGRATION OF THE RANK AND FILE, BUT AS IN THE PAST ALL THE KEY POSITIONS WERE HELD BY THE MARONITES. HE GATHERED THAT THE CHIEF OF STAFF, MUNIR TARABAY, WAS UNHAPPY WITH HIS LARGELY

CEREMONIAL POSITION AND WAS PLANNING TO COME TO SEE SALAM TO COMPLAIN. I REPEATED MY REMARKS TO JUMBLATT ABOUT OUR DESIRE TO SEE THE ARMY INTEGRATED AND THE SURVEY TEAM'S FINDINGS IN THAT RESPECT. SALAM SAID KHOURY WAS TELLING HIM THE SAME THING, BUT HE WAS GETTING COMPLAINTS FROM MUSLIM OFFICERS WHO SAID THEY WERE BEING IGNORED.

9. SALAM SAID MARONITE LEADERSHIP WAS SPLIT OVER THE AIN AR-RUMMANEH AFFAIR. FORMER PRESIDENT SULEIMAN FRANGIEH HAD TOLD A SHIA DELEGATION THAT RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE AFFAIR RESTED WITH MARONITE LEADERS AND NOT WITH SYRIANS. HE CLAIMED TO HAVE TOLD OTHER LEBANESE FRONT MEMBERS THAT SYRIANS HAD CEASED FIRE ON CONDITION THAT CHRISTIANS STOP BUT THE CHRISTIANS HAD REFUSED TO STOP BECAUSE THEIR LEADERS HAD NOT  
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GIVEN THE ORDERS.

10. COMMENT: SAEB SAID HE HOPED I WOULD NOT GET DISCOURAGED, BECAUSE LEBANESE WERE COUNTING ON ME TO HELP THEM IN THEIR TRAVAIL. HE HIMSELF, HOWEVER, WAS CONSIDERABLY LESS EBULLIENT THAN USUAL AND SEEMED DEPRESSED. WHEN I TOLD HIM DANY CHAMOUN HAD ASKED ME TO TELL THE SUNNIS THAT THE CHAMOUNISTS BELIEVED IN A UNITED LEBANON, SALAM NOTED THAT DANY HAD BEEN TRYING TO MEET WITH HIS SON, TAMAM, AND HE THOUGHT IT WOULD BE A GOOD IDEA, BUT TAMAM WAS GOING OFF ON A TWO WEEK'S TRIP. IT DID NOT SOUND AS THOUGH SAEB WAS ATTACHING MUCH HOPE TO THE POSSIBILITY OF A DIALOGUE WITH THE CHAMOUNS.  
PARKER

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